



## Being, doing and leading in the project society

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# Being, doing and leading in the project society

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# Being, doing and leading in the project society

## Abstract

The last decades have seen a proliferation of projects across different contexts, from the building of an iconic venue to the planning of a family vacation. Building on Jensen (2009) work on the project society and Jensen *et al* (2016) articulation of projects as human conditions, this article explores strategies for living in the project society.

Guided by the philosophical concepts of activity, time, space and relations, we explore the project society as an ideal type, in opposition to the disciplinary society. We discuss implications of being, doing and leading in a project society. Taken together this analysis describes some of the key challenges emerging from the project society and suggests some ideas and advices to fellow project man and woman, navigating in project society.

The work extends our understanding of projects beyond organizational settings – to a societal and individual level. We argue that, first, our growing and insightful body of literature on project organizing can become useful for each one of us as individuals navigating in project society. Second, it opens up to a more extensive empirical context – studying behaviour of people in projects, outside classic organizational settings. In this respect, the article serves as a basis for future research on living in the project society where nothing lasts forever but our projects define who we are and what we can become.

Keywords: Projectification, project society, philosophy, projects as a living experience

## Introduction: Projects as a human condition

Projects are everywhere. We find it in our workplaces, our spare time activities even in our most intimate relations are shaped by projects. Thus, projects have become intrinsic to our lives. They permeate what we do, how we speak, how we think of our daily activities (Lundin et al., 2015), how we construct our identities, and ultimately, who we are and who we might become. In this regard, we organize a portfolio of projects in our lives—from a career move to a family vacation—and in many respects, these projects and programs of projects will profoundly shape our lives, not only in terms of their consequences but also in terms of how we live, act, and relate to others. We live in a project society that manifest itself in diverse areas as production, social relations, family structures, dancing, football (soccer), banking and cafés (Jensen, 2009).

We can understand the transition to a project society by looking at the evolution of dancing in the last four decades, (explained more in detail in Jensen, 2012, chp.2). Since people let go of each others hands with the twist, the relation between dancers ceased being fixed throughout the dance. One could no longer answer clearly the question ‘with whom will you dance the next four minutes’. Instead, it relies on the actual activity during these four minutes, connecting and disconnecting without touching. The relation is continually negotiated during the dance and depends on the activity that one puts into the dance, and where this activity is directed. Therefore, it is possible to

dance with more people at once, and with different quality of relation between the people at the same time. The moment the activity stops, the relation is no longer there, and if all stops the dance floor simply disappears.

This example is not a metaphor. The history of dance develops together with the rest of society, and so the rise of the project society can be seen in the history of dance as well as in the history of warfare, types of appointments between friends or the history of the distribution of sex and coupling (Jensen, 2009).

The project society is a response to the changing (and accelerating) world responding to three increasingly important factors: 1) the ability to reorganize quickly, 2) the ability to incorporate what accidentally happens instead of eliminating that the accidents happens, 3) the ability to respond to feedback from the environment. Much more than the competences of a planning machine, like a hand ball team training the same combinations again and again, it became necessary to have the agility and sensitivity of the surfer: to take what destiny (the surroundings, nature, the other people, the market...) brings, go with it and use it your way. It requires not only sensitivity and timing. On social matters, the politeness of the trained aristocrat is challenged by the charm and the humor of Clumsy Hans. Living in a project society thus requires specific competences and strategies in order to succeed.

The ambition of this paper is to explore the strategies for living in the project society. We do so by first introducing the philosophical concepts activity, space, time, and relations along with a short outline of the main characteristics of the project society. This creates a platform on which we subsequently identify a list of heretic advises for being, doing and leading in the project society. We conclude with suggested research agenda for further explorations in the domain.

## From the disciplinary society to the project society

Our understanding of the project society is structured around four fundamental concepts of philosophy, which are useful to describe a human condition (Jensen et al 2016): what we do (activity), where we do it (space), when we do it (time) and with whom (relations). Inspired by Foucauldian thinking (e.g. Foucault 1975), Jensen et al (2016) identify how the configuration of these concepts has been reshaped in the last five decades from a disciplinary society (e.g. industrialized society<sup>1</sup>) to a project society where projects not only exists at work, but in social living in general. The following table illustrates this transition.

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<sup>1</sup> In some contexts, a synonym to disciplinary society could be modernity, industrial society, urbanity or taylorism.

	<b>Disciplinary Society</b>	<b>Project Society</b>
Relationship between activity, space, time, and relations	Space, time, and relations define activity.	Activity becomes the order and opens up time, space, and relations.  Space, time, and relations can create the probability that an activity will take place.
Activity	Activity is mostly repetitive and organized through predictions.	Activity is emerging, unique, temporary, and organized through projections into the future, as opposed to repetitions of the past.
Space	Space shapes activity: One space is related to one activity.	Activity shapes spaces. Spaces are designed for maximum flexibility aimed to create the probability for activity.
Time	Activity is “permanent,” based on repetition in a constant flow.	Activity is temporary; hence, there is time in and between projects. This raises the need for a passage between projects.
Relations	Relations exist in a fixed hierarchy, bounded by time and space.	Activity is relational, thus connecting is more important than relying on fixed relationships.

### Activity

The constitution of the disciplinary society relies on a plan organizing space and time, so that the performance of the activity can be predicted in space and time: when, where, how and how fast it is going to take place. Thus, activity is mostly repetitive and organized through predictions. Through establishment of discipline(s), activities are institutionalised and uniformalised. For example a Waltz is learned at a dance school, by following certain patterns in a certain tempo, pre-decided by the dance teacher. In line with this one could imagine the world of bureaucracy (Weber 1922) and discipline (Foucault 1975) as a scene in a theatre: the wings are set, the time is set, the roles are set – and then begins the play, the activity.

The project society is more like a dynamo: it is the activity, that opens the space, the time and the relations, and when the activity stops, the space shuts down, the time shuts down and the relations stops. Thus we can talk about a change from ‘a priori determination’ to ‘a posteriori determination’. What, when, where and with whom it is going to happen is in the project society to a larger extent decided by what actually happens, than by the plan. In extreme projects even the criteria for and measurements of success are determined by the activity: what we aim for we cannot say until some activity has unfolded and we see where it takes us.

## Space

What is characteristic to the disciplinary space is that it is formatted before the activity takes place. As the dance floor is there before the dance, so is every institution formatted to make certain activities take place at a certain time. In the disciplinary society, the functions are sorted out in different spaces. A space with a specific function and with opening hours, could be an institution, but it could as well be a for example a class room with specific functions. In order to perform a certain activity one would have to go to that space at the settled time for that special activity.

In the project society activity becomes more central and the formatting of space loses some of its determinative power. Society becomes characterized by functions rather than mere institutions. For example learning becomes important, not the school. Healthcare becomes central, not the hospital itself. This however, does *not* mean that space does not exist in the project society; it is fundamental to human experience. *Nor* does it mean, that we don't have spaces organized for certain functions to take place any more. *Rather* it means, that activities open projects in the 'old' formatted spaces. The dance floor opens in the kitchen if somebody dance there. The meeting activity opens working function in what is formatted as a café. The jogging activity opens preventions of healthcare in the space formatted as holiday center.

## Time

Instead of the hour defining the activity, the activity opens the time. Like the dance activity opens a time for dancing, the learning activity opens school time, instead of a school bell ringing based on a predefined plan.

In the disciplinary society, planning is very often focusing on repetition. Here time was associated with tact (on the dance floor and production line), ensuring continuous flow between different types of activities. However, as the project only runs once, a planning of a project can never be a planning of a repetition. Moreover, as it is the first time it runs and therefore surrounded by uncertainty, planning can be very illusionary or sometimes a play to imitate the more predictable world of the disciplinary organization.

We have thus moved our orientation in time from the past to the future. Project society is the society that is oriented forward, not relying so much on repetition of the past. As Anthony Giddens (1994), Richard Sennett (1998) and others have pointed out, tradition has lost its legitimizing force. This affects even our identities: we draw meaning from the future, from what we are becoming, when we understand ourselves, rather than where we come from (space) and what we have repeated (past time) or our family (relations).

## Relations

In the disciplinary society, the relations were formatted by space (the village, the neighbor) and time (the generation). Relations were formed by structure and existed only within it: spatial (neighbors), blood (family), and functional (colleague). The relations were between entities or persons that in some sense belonged together within that structure. For example, the colleague was the one working beside during the same working hours. Just as time and space were settled before the activity, so was relation. The dance partner in the disciplinary society was defined before the dance, as one had to ask for a dance. Moving from the disciplinary to the project society, the dance relation changes character by not requiring physical contact creating space for self-expression. This opens the opportunity to dance with more at the same time.

In the project society, the relations are (in the purest form of the project society) no longer relations in a hierarchical structure, but in a network. It is more adequate to describe the relations in the project society as connections. Connections are on a middle distance – the optimal is on the distance, where they don't oblige you to do anything or to desist from doing anything, but still so close, that they can be used in projects or in passages between projects. As such the connections are considered as pathways, partners or providers of a quasi-security. When we have a lot of connections, we call it a network. A project is an activity within a network (Boltanski & Chiapello, 1999, p.157).

## Living in the project society

The project society provides a different 'Weltanschauen', i.e. a different perspective into ourselves, our work and society at large. In the following, we will explore strategies for how we live in project society where projects has become a human condition. We conceptualize living in the project society in under the themes of being, doing and leading.

- **Being:** human condition, in the fabric of who we are – Heidegger (1996/1927, p. 49-58) from subject-object to a more fundamental existence of being in the world
- **Doing:** both as doing is the essence of project society, but also a reflection on how to 'do', i.e. how to act in project society
- **Leading:** we lead and are led constantly in the project society. In this section, we reflect on implications of project society as a human condition to how we manage (or lead) our projects. This also leads to implications to alternative approaches to manage projects in project society

Table 2 connects these themes to the identified characteristics of the project society summarized in Table 1. Following the table, and inspired by Christensen and Kreiner (1991), we elaborate heretical advises for living in the project society.

Project studies as an academic field has been reflecting about forms of managing and organizing projects for over 60 years. In our discussions of being, doing and leading, we connect to concepts and ideas proposed in the project literature, in an attempt to understand how our knowledge about managing and organizing projects can assist us navigate project society, both as humans (actors and leaders). This exercises also serves to question some established practices in managing projects, as well as to provide alternative understanding of some of our incipient theories. Throughout the discussion, we establish some connections between the field of project studies and project society and propose future research emerging from this quite peculiar and unusual perspective.

Characteristics of project society		Heretic advises for Being, Doing and Leading in a Project Society		
		Being	Doing	Leading
Activity	Activity is emerging, unique, temporary and organized through projections into the future.	<b>Being active</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Be active in order to construct an exciting and ‘unique’ identity which transcend established professions</li> </ul>	<b>Acting</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Be active, yet choose projects wisely, and balance between focus and diversity, creating an emerging narrative which connects past, current and future projects and builds one’s identity (so to enhance employability)</li> </ul>	<b>Leading activity</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Instead of assigning resources, attract interesting people and give them opportunities aligned with their identity and the project needs and therefore create visions that are specific, desirable and can hold many possible solutions.</li> </ul>
Space	Activity shapes spaces. Spaces are designed for maximum flexibility aimed to create the probability for activity.	<b>Being in space</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Dasein - Be present and mindful of space and its intrinsic relationship with activity and ultimately our identities. Don’t be ‘available’</li> </ul>	<b>Moving</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Create space for projects</li> <li>Make sure you always are in a maneuverable space and secure passage between projects through double booking and accepting without committing to new project ideas (yes = maybe)</li> </ul>	<b>Leading space</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Shape space, time and relations to create the probability for something to happen.</li> <li>Create an environment, which encourages commitment</li> </ul>
Time	Activity is <b>temporary</b> , hence there is time in and between projects (passage)	<b>Being in time</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cope with the mix of anxiety and thrill, stress and flow while shaping and managing our project portfolios</li> </ul>	<b>Timing</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Create time through multi-tasking</li> <li>Timing the passage between projects, and projects as passages (temporary springboard to something else)</li> </ul>	<b>Leading time</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Create attention and sense of urgency to time projects, by for example, minimizing interruptions from the outside without isolating people.</li> </ul>
Relationship	Activity is <b>relational</b> , thus connecting is more important than relying on fixed relationships	<b>Being connected</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Be connected and stay connected, you never know when you would like to engage with a person again</li> </ul>	<b>Networking</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Leverage your network with minimum of obligations and use it as insurance</li> </ul>	<b>Leading connections</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Don't rely on hierarchies but leverage connections</li> <li>Create social and not economic contracts.</li> </ul>



## Activity

### Being active

The underlying principle of being active is associated with the active and conscious identity formation, i.e. the development of one's own distinct personality embedded in a socio, historical, cultural and economic context (Giddens, 1991). We are defined by what we do, as represented in the rephrasing of Descartes **"I am doing therefore I exist, ergo sum ergo."** Although our identity is informed by the past, and by what we are currently doing, it is also shaped by the future, i.e. by the possibilities of becoming.

Therefore, while professions are important, they are not sufficient to navigate the project society. Profession and private life melts into the development of our identities. The aim becomes that of developing an identity, which is recognized to be 'exciting', unique, based on one's own paths beyond their profession. In a disciplinary society, there were doctors, and lawyers, and engineers, etc. Today even the study lines are getting increasingly blurred and varied.

The profession therefore becomes a springboard to the development of one's own identity. For example, an interesting character in the project society will be more than only a lawyer, but will be someone fighting for the rights of X or Y; more than an ophthalmologist, but someone involved in the irradiation of blindness in the world. Therefore, the trajectories become nearly random and individualized. The project society values being part of 'cool things', having an interesting life, opinions and experiences, instead of recognized titles or professions. In this context, projects such as a-year travel across the world increases perception of success, so as being part of *medecins sans frontieres* (doctors without borders) or of an Olympic game, or other exciting projects and programs.

In this respect, projects become opportunities to develop 'interesting' and 'exciting' identities, and thereby build attractive and successful professionals. In other words, projects become building blocks of one's own identity – both as individuals and as professionals.

Likewise, people like to be involved in projects with interesting people, and such interesting people themselves increase legitimacy of projects. Therefore, survival in project society depends on how each of us manifest ourselves as such interesting and exciting person, and hence the importance of self-marketing increases.

### Acting

Being active is at the heart of the project society. Through our activities, we frame our historical projects and open the possibilities of involvement in future projects and activities. It is the premises for being seen and standout. This introduces the paradox – rather misused than not used. This is e.g. the case in the film industry where people work without salary under the impression that participation in current projects increase the possibilities for being involved in future ones.

Yet, being active does not mean accepting to join all projects that pass by. The sum of activities shapes who we are and our possibilities for future projects. Thus, it is key to **act strategically to create an emerging narrative connecting your past, current and future projects.**

Multiple narratives can co-exist, and are shaped to fit the current situation. In this respect, we alter our narratives so they fit the profile needed in the projects in which we would like to participate. For one project, you might emphasize a part of your learning trajectory while another project calls

for another framing. Today, jobs are not acquired by a standard CV but instead by demonstrating a partial alignment between the candidate's multiple visions and that of the project/organization.

Yet, not every narrative goes (nor would be ethical to hold), and coherence increases reputation and legitimacy in the network. Thus, one must **choose projects wisely, and balance between focused and diverse activities**. It is important to think strategically about how projects shape our identities and contributes to our overall employability: Do I want to work for this company? How will it fit into my overall profile? Will I be able to capitalize on my current skills? Will I develop new skills, which are important for me in the future? Would it fit my moral and social ambitions? Would it contribute to goals I would like to work on?

In this respect, concepts such as program and portfolio management, and its normative suggestions, become useful advices to navigate the project society. In this respect, echoing e.g. Cooper et al (1999), each individual manages their own project portfolio, establishes priorities, assess new project opportunities against strategic objectives, their relative risk vs. benefit, assign 'resources' (most valuable being one's own time and energy), change priorities as projects develop and context change, etc. Similarly, projects can be grouped into programmes. In this respect, we construct connections between projects, with the aim to attain strategic benefits that could not be realized were not projects coordinated (Maylor, Brady, Cooke-Davies, & Hodgson, 2006).

Introducing programs and portfolios for organizing our personal activities might challenge the literature as the understanding of activities and projects are much broader.

#### Leading activity

Leading in a project society is a challenging task, as each individual leads his or her own career paths, including the leader. As mentioned above, people involved in our projects (including ourselves) will be seeking opportunities to develop themselves and their identities. In other words, they will consider how the project will fit their current trajectory, and how that project will enable them to transit to other even more interesting projects.

Therefore, any attempt to exercise leadership involves attracting and engaging with individuals building their own identities in oppose to allocating standard 'professions'.

Traditionally resources are assigned to projects after disputes for different resources, and potentially 'fight' to get the best resources. In the project society even if a project manager 'won' the fight for the best resources, this does not mean that the 'resource' will truly 'join' the project. Project managers need not only to win resources upstream in hierarchy but also attract individual talents and constantly sell their ideas, and how they are related with each individual trajectory.

Hence, we content that in a project society, offering (or co-creating) interesting projects is fundamental to keep interesting people around. Project purpose gives direction, guides collaboration amongst project team members and other stakeholders and allows for individual learning and identities development. The purpose must **be specific** establishing clear projection of the future, **hold many possible solutions** enabling multiple paths to be explored and **be desirable** by connecting to our personal values and preferences.

Obviously, what is interesting is not universally defined. Different trajectories and identities will be searching for different things. People must be given opportunities aligned with their profiles and the project needs. This is embedded in Christiansen and Kreiner (1991) first and second heretic advices: "Establish your project in a vision that at the same time is specific and can hold many possible

solutions” and “Do not assault the perspectives on reality held by the participants by authorizing a common reality for the project”.

A further implication for project managers is that as people construct idiosyncratic trajectories, professions become blurred, diffuse and complex, and social capital becomes fundamental to navigate and resource projects. It becomes difficult to recognize ‘real’ talent - Talents who are not as proficient in self-marketing may be overlooked and the other way around. For example, if everyone writes a book, it becomes hard to choose books to read. Here we see other mechanisms emerging that facilitate these choices such as ‘likes’ or ‘followers’ or personal network, or ‘legitimized’ institutions (e.g. Harvard, Cambridge, Oxford, Stanford, etc) and sources of information (UN, WTO, WHO, etc). High ‘scores’ in such mechanisms and involvement in legitimate institutions are related (but not only) with our ability to maintain employability and reputation. Thus, this apparent flexibility and flow is embedded in highly path-dependent trajectories, which are not so easily de-constructed and re-shaped, as shown in past research on project ecologies and networks (Manning & Sydow, 2011; Sydow & Staber, 2002).

Studies in project context identified similar challenges in choosing to people with highest potential to the project as well as engaging and ‘monitoring’ their actions and performance in projects and across projects. As classic career paths collapses, the mere certification of project management does not guarantee good project manager. For example, echoes Bechky (2006)’s study on film and advertisement industry suggests that coordination, quality and performance control takes place on the go, during the setting, mixing humor with on how Clegg & Courpasson (2004)’s reflections on modalities of control in project organizations, which draw on, amongst others, on reputations and a strong sense of professionalism. The discussions on vision are also echoed in, for instance, Kreiner & Winch (2010) discussions on Schultz’s concept of future and in Pitsis et al (2003) discussion on future perfect. Further studies could be enriched by bringing in a more realistic perspective of motivations and work allocation in projects, in particular in relation to human resource management in projects, not least issues related to the work-worker fit (see discussions in Maylor et al 2010).

## Space

### Being in space

Being present in spaces of the project society requires a sensibility towards the context. Spaces of the project society are designed to facilitate multiple activities. The café and the office both are the home of banking, working, dating networking. Even though some are flexible, it is not always the case. Some of the disciplinary spaces still exist and enforces their structure on us and our activities.

Thus, it is important to **be present and mindful** in space and time - dasein. First, mindfulness represents the sense of being in the present and awaken (Langer, 1989/2014) to how space enables or constrains one’s own activities. For example, how does this meeting room influence our meeting? How do this park facilitate a nice walk? How does the office facilitate connections and focused work?

Apart from a strong context awareness, mindfulness involves not receiving space as is, as a ‘container where action unfolds’, but as a dynamic context, in intrinsic relationship with ourselves as actors. Analogous to phenomenological studies of competencies (Sandberg, 1994; Partington et al 2005), our activity shapes space, and, to a lesser degree, space shapes our activities. In this respect, our reflections about space extend from considering how does this meeting room influence

our meeting, to how do we create spaces and what does it tell us about how we act on meetings, our body, our movements, our relationship with objects around us? In this regard, being is space constitutes also part of our identities.

Being present is however not equals being available. By being available, a person represents a free resource, which might be allocated to a specific project, which not necessarily might be his or her interest. By just being present, a person has the possibility to engage in the projects that he or she chooses. Therefore, **be present but not available** (Christiansen & Kreiner 1991).

### Moving

Although activity opens up space, time and relations, yet this does not take place ‘automatically’ or easily. Space, time and relations can stifle activity. Therefore, ‘don’t let time, space and relations constrain actions. **Create a space for projects:** Spaces are opened through projects and create the probability of certain actions – not everything can take place everywhere, but space does not define exactly what needs to take place, it only creates probability of it to happen. This has three practical implications: (1) Take action based on the sensitivity towards the present space. Think yourself as a surfer riding a wave creating maximum results of the current context. (2) Create space for future activities. Think of yourself as an architect creating optimal living conditions. Organize the space around you to suit the projects that you want to do. (3) Note that the space will also be part of your ‘shopping window’, and provide further information about you to your network. In this regard, the space showcases the person.

The creation of space is also a matter of establishing flexibility. As many opportunities arise unexpectedly, it is important to **make sure you always are in a manoeuvrable space** so you can take advantage of the potential rising opportunities. The flexibility usually comes with the downside of not knowing what to do tomorrow. Thus, it is wise to organize your projects and jobs so you constantly have something to do. This introduce portfolio and program management at an individual level.

In this process, **double booking to cope with flow of events** is an important practice. Since opportunities not always turn into actual projects and since projects rarely are initiated according to the plan, it is important to be able to keep opportunities open by not saying no. Thus are one of the most important phrase in the project society – YES. However, it is a vague yes. It is not a Yes (definitely) but more a **YES (maybe)**. In this way, you make sure your options are open minimizing your vulnerability to options not turning into projects – a practice widely used in any project-based organization.

However, ‘Yes’ needs also to be balanced with workload, and potential high levels of stress. If all projects materialise, unlike expected, there is a need for delicate prioritisation. Making such judgement calls and balancing opportunities is extremely difficult. Failing in it can lead to stress due to over commitment, as well as create an image of unreliability or disappoint parts of your network.

### Leading space

**Shape space, time and relations** in a way that it does **not to stifle but to create the probability for something to happen**. Organizations must develop a context for projects through the purposeful ‘design’ of space, time and relationships to offer the possibility for projects to emerge –

and strive! This can be achieved by for example, a clear and easy infrastructure processes, flexible offices, co-location of project teams, meeting rooms, easy hire and fire, etc – they need to become organizations that manage for projects!

Such forms of organizing are also aware of people creating their own maneuvering space. This might be a major issue since the talented people typically are involved in many projects and activities outside the project and organization. The multitasking project member run the risk having many things going on and many possibilities for procrastination. Thus, it is important to create an environment, which **encourages commitment to projects**.

The importance of space has been widely recognized in management and project management. The role of space and office space has gained wide attentions a few years back in organization theory and organizational behavior, and even found some resonance in the work in project management. The need for, for instance, a project room, goes as far back as the works such as Shunk works practices in Lockheed, or even further back to Gaibraith (1977), and the following discussions on organizations structures. Yet, further studies could focus on, for instance, the practices of project managers involved in creating space, and therewith attention to their projects.

## Time

### Being in time

Surviving in the project society requires the ability to use time wisely. Time becomes the scarcest resource - accepting to participate in one project means reducing available time to engage in other activities. We choose projects under high uncertainty, as we do not know what will be our potential future opportunities. Taken the ultimate implication of the choices is the formation of one's own identity and, indirectly, reputation and employability. We live under pressure to 'make the best choice', and it is difficult to cope with constant choices about projects, and what it could have been if we have made a different choice. In other words, we manage our project portfolio in an attempt to construct an emerging and exciting identity.

Here we must **cope with the mix of anxiety and thrill, stress and flow**, which are enforced on us. Given the individual responsibility of crafting our own projects we are simultaneously balancing the flow of the current activity (matching the challenge with our competences) and the potential stress for making the agreed deliverables which are central to our value in the network and thereby our possibilities for being involved in future projects.

### Timing

A central practice for handling the potential consequences of double booking - having too much to do. An approach to handle this is by **creating time**. Although this seems impossible, project management provides strategies and tools for managing and optimizing time. These practices are also relevant at an individual level. How do you make sure you have the resources for delivering the promised results in the projects that you do? How do you prioritize your potential scarce resources? It is relevant both professionally and our private life. One of the central strategies here is to **multi-task – to do several things at the same time**. This does not mean that we should be writing articles while lecturing, nor that focuses time is irrelevant. Instead, we propose the combination of activities

in a meaningful way. This is a key practice to every family with small children, for example, teaching children colors by separating cloths, or fine motoric by arranging dishes in dishwasher.

The drawback of multitasking is the difficulty of keeping an overview of all ongoing projects, its different status, related connections, etc. Therefore, it is also important create time and space for getting things done. This might be achieved by **scheduling time for your own activities** in the calendar. In combination with the ability to prioritize this is a necessity for “delivering” and thereby maintain a professionalism. In other words, ‘self-discipline’ is required. In contrast with the disciplinary society, the discipline here is self-created, and in many ways much harder to keep in face of multiple pressures and distractions from the outside.

The consequences of such challenges have been widely discussed in, for instance, behavioural side of scheduling, a conversation started by Goldratt (1997). Yet, the political creation of space and space for manoeuvre could be further explored, in projects as usual as well in a wider variety of projects in project society. Work from psychology, such as overload, procrastination and positive (and negative) facets of optimism bias can also yield interesting future research.

Another dimension to the handling is to **secure your passage**. As projects are, temporary they end and thus you must have something else to do when it is finalized. As seminally pointed by e.g. Brown and Eisenhardt (1998), as the project reaches completion, the team will be rather thinking about the next project instead of focusing on the current one. The passage between projects is particularly stressful period for all project people. What will be the next project? How to get there? How can I improve my possibilities for involvement in future projects. The current project is therefore conceptualized as the springboard to the next project – a point of passage to other even more interesting projects.

There has been some studies about the moments of passage from one project to the next, and its implications, yet there is room for further studies on how networks of new projects are built (following e.g. the lead of Manning 2015), the actions of forming options during projects, etc.

### Leading time

Managing time is a classic in field of project management but it gains a different dimension in the project society: managing time in a context where people are constantly distracted by other projects, see each of their current projects as mere passages, and preoccupied with themselves, their identities and passages to the next project. The difficulty here is to create the adequate attention to the project, and develop a sense of urgency to make people commit and work together to, e.g. meet a deadline. This includes, for example, avoid constant interruptions and unnecessary turbulence while not isolating people (Anderson, 2003).

Further studies on the practices of managers and organizations in the development of such urgency as well as that of ‘project followers’ to accept urgency, and work heavy hours on ‘someone’s else’ project would be examples of potential future inquiries in the area.



## Relations

### Being connected

Activities define our relationships. Whilst relationships have been stable and defined by family, social class, and work. As Manning (2015) suggests, core ties in the network are stable from project to project. Thus, we actively build our network as a resource that can create the probability to be involved in more interesting and exciting projects in the future. The network tends to be international and crosses private and social boundaries, including e.g. colleges, former classmates, industry partners, ex-girlfriends, spare time activities, and other social activities. Our ability to use our network actively for shaping who we are and who we want to be is key. Thus **being connected** is a central part of your identity.

Through our involvement in projects we are connecting to many different people which for good and bad is becoming a part of our networks and shape who we are. In this process, it is important to **stay connected and as you never know when you would like to engage with a person again**. This goes two ways. You might sometime in the future need their competences or other network relations or they might benefit of yours. Thus is important to keep a strong network capital.

### Networking

With the project society, we move from occupying a robust position in hierarchy to an anti-fragile networked identity. Networking is an inherent part of the project society. A well-developed **network is an insurance**, it protects us for not being able to make the passage from one project to the other – with a strong network, there will be always a project starting that one still can join in. Therefore, networking is way to develop antifragility towards the uncertainty of the project society.

Thus, it is important constantly to develop and maintain one's own network. Do I have the necessary connections in network? Are they accessible? What are they up to? This is not an easy task since one must be able to leverage the network with minimum of obligations – keeping network is time consuming.

Time in projects turn to be an excellent form of developing social capital. In this respect, echoing the discourse on employability vs. employment, loyalty is not about staying in the same project or organization, but about becoming ambassadors of that project when moving to next ones, and so propagating the work in the project and its 'success' – i.e. our terrific job in managing X and Y.

### Leading connections

Networking is more than ensuring the passage, it is also key for **taping into talent**. As movements such as the hollow organization, open innovation, 'boundaryless' careers teach us, there is always a larger number of bright people outside one's own organization than inside. Therefore, we are looking to attract talents to work with you. One could argue that this has been what good project managers would be doing anyway. Yet, from project society perspective it means winning people over to the project, they may even be volunteering to work for the project vision, or supporting it, or paying for it (crowd sourcing, e.g. FairPhone), even doing work for it (e.g. Linux). As projects becomes the center for actions, joining an exciting project becomes a 'privilege'. Thus, **don't rely on hierarchies but leverage connections**.

Resource assigned to a project will do what they are told to do, and not what they would like to do. Many can be complaining about the wish to be in another project, they are assigned to the project,

but actually, their minds and hearts are in other projects. Thus, project managers would need to help people articulate the connection between project and their own trajectories, and ‘win’ them over.

The need to get ‘buy in’, engage the team is not a new concept. Literature in management and project management does not lack work on motivation and engagement of employees. Yet, the project society provides us with interesting perspective to derive ways to operationalize this into project practices. The challenge is to **cope with talents saying YES (maybe)** as discussed before.

Indeed, people will join in different levels – commitment takes place as a social contract, and taken the nature of the project, that is the kind of contract one would like to create with peers – not only because of potential work overhours, etc, but to really attract the mind and souls of people around your project. **Thus, create social and not economic contracts.**

Finally, it is important to create an interesting springboard to next even more interesting projects. This might include working with other outstanding talents or even project celebrities. The later are characterized as persons who might not have the time to work on the project but by their superficial affiliation to the project they have the potential to create magnetism around the project.

## Concluding reflections

The last decades have seen a proliferation of projects across different contexts, from the building of an iconic venue to the planning of a family vacation. Building on Jensen (2009) seminal work on the project society and Jensen *et al* (2016) articulation of projects as human conditions this article explores the strategies for living in the project society.

Guided by the philosophical concepts of activity, time, space and relations, we explore the project society as an ideal type, in opposition to the disciplinary society. We discuss implications of being, doing and leading in a project society. Taken together, this analysis describes some of the key challenges emerging from projects as a human condition and suggests some ideas and advices to fellow project man and woman to navigate in our project society.

The work extends our understanding of projects beyond organizational settings – to a societal and individual level. The consequence of such expansion though is a potential further fragmentation of the field: it is difficult to develop any sense of unity and common theorizing if we, as a knowledge field, study a phenomenon that is so diverse to include both a mega project costing billions of Euros with finding a new partner (Söderlund 2011).

Yet, we argue that, our growing and insightful body of literature on project organizing can become useful for each one of us as individuals navigating in project society. In more radical realm, it could even be argued that being project leader and follower becomes such an essential skill to all those living in project society, that project management could be even taught in more fundamental levels of education, perhaps even in schools.

Second, it opens up to a more extensive empirical context – studying behavior of people in projects, outside classic organizational settings. In this respect, the article serves as a basis for future research on practices of being project leaders and followers – within the classic ‘projects as usual’, but also



our lives as human beings. Nothing lasts forever but we are always on way to our self-realization through the projects in which we engage.

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